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Farr, Eshoo, Honda oppose attack on Iraq

By BRIAN SEALS

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Congress is expected to give President Bush authority this coming week to declare war on Iraq, but it won't be with the support of Santa Cruz County's congressional delegation.

As United Nations inspectors iron out details to re-enter Iraq, a resolution that would allow Bush to declare war without U.N. support is headed for votes in both houses of Congress. U.S. Reps. Sam Farr, Mike Honda and Anna Eshoo all plan to vote against the resolution, breaking with party leadership in the house, including minority leader Dick Gephardt of Missouri.

The Democratic trio offered similar reasons for not supporting it.

"I don't think the president has made his case to the American public that an invasion of Iraq is necessary," Farr said from Washington, D.C., on Friday.

The Carmel resident, whose district covers Monterey County and most of Santa Cruz County, said the president should exhaust all diplomatic channels before asking Congress to go to war. He said U.N. investigators should do inspections first.

"If you just ask Congress for support of the U.N. investigating, you'd probably get 100 percent support," Farr said.

Honda, a San Jose resident whose district covers Scotts Valley and the San Lorenzo Valley — at least until Eshoo officially takes it over, a result of redistricting — is taking a like stance, said his spokesman, Ruben Pulido Jr.

"At this point, the congressman (Honda) feels the president has not exhausted all diplomatic options," Pulido said. "The president has to make his case of an imminent threat."

Eshoo could not be reached to comment, but wrote in a statement that she would oppose the resolution.

"A unilateral, pre-emptive strike by the administration is dramatic, unwise and extraordinary departure from U.S. foreign policy," said Eshoo, a Palo Alto resident. "Unilateralism sends the wrong message to our allies in the world because coalitions lend legitimacy to what we do. Never has it been more important to have allies with us."

She called on Bush to do as his father, President George H.W. Bush, did during the Gulf War, and wait until after mid-term elections to seek a vote in Congress.

That isn't likely as the president is pushing for congressional support for his request. The administration maintains that Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction and chemical weapons.

"This is a man who is a threat, a threat to the United States, a threat to Israel, he's a threat to neighbors," Bush said Friday in Boston, where he reiterated his pledge to act with or without United Nations support.

Farr counters that congressional briefings have fallen short of proving Hussein is a threat. He said the assumption is that materials left in the country when arms inspectors left in 1998 could have been developed. Terrorists pose a threat to the United States, Farr said, but Iraq does not.

Farr's office has been swamped with letters opposing the administration's policy, he said. The congressman said he has received about 3,600 letters of opposition and 10 letters of support for Bush's approach.

The Santa Cruz City Council and the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors have passed resolutions opposing war in Iraq.

Contact Brian Seals at bseals@santa-cruz.com.

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